



## Basic Research in the Archives of the Texas General Land Office

*Thousands of settlers immigrated to Texas during the nineteenth century. Most of these settlers came because of cheap and abundant public lands that were made available through a variety of government programs.*

*Generous land grant programs were first established under Mexican colonization laws. Similar provisions for land grants under the republic and then the state of Texas followed after Texas won its independence from Mexico. In addition, Texas used the public domain at various times to secure loans, reward soldiers and encourage economic development, and even to build the current state capitol.*

*One result of Texas' generous public lands program was the creation of extensive records documenting thousands of immigrants to Texas; a wealth of information for historical research. Records on file in the Archives of the General Land Office (GLO) will indicate if individuals received a certificate for an original grant from the public domain.*



The kind of information that may be found in the General Land Office records depends on the type of grant received and reflects the land grant process. Land grants under Mexican colonization laws (1821-1835) were administered by land commissioners in each *empresario* colony. Records in the General Land Office Spanish Collection can provide the date when the individual received title to the land and where that land was located. Copies can be made of the original title, which is in Spanish. A Spanish translator is on staff and can assist researchers with the Mexican period records.

The land grant process under the republic and state involved three steps:

- First, a prospective settler received a certificate for a specified amount of the public domain. Texas created a variety of programs with different qualifications for land (see reference sheet “Categories of Land Grants in Texas”).
- Second, either the grantee (the person receiving the certificate) or an assignee (a person purchasing the certificate from the grantee) would locate available land from within the public domain. Using the certificate, a grantee or his assigns could have the desired land surveyed. The certificate and field notes, a written description of the survey, were then sent to the General Land Office and filed.

- The final step in securing a grant could only be taken after all of the conditions for receiving the grant, such as making improvements or paying fees, had been met. Once these conditions had been fulfilled a person could then apply for a patent (the legal conveyance of title) from the General Land Office.

The basic documents concerning a land grant found in the GLO Archives are certificates, field notes, and land patents. Other legal instruments such as certificate transfers, duplicate certificates, and powers of attorney may also be present.

Several general characteristics of the land grant are important to note:

- Land grant certificates were not associated with a specific piece of land. It was the responsibility of the certificate holder to find vacant public land and locate a survey.
- Land did not have to be located in the same county where the certificate was issued. For example, John Smith may have received a certificate in Harris County but actually located his survey in Travis County.
- The grantee could sell or assign the certificate before or after a survey was made. As a result, many of the people who received a certificate did not actually settle on the land.

## **Individual Name Search**

If you are conducting research on an individual who may have been issued a certificate the research staff of the Archives and Records Division will conduct a search for any records contained in our collection that may pertain to the person you are studying. This search includes the primary official records related to Texas land grants as well as any subsidiary information contained in one of our Special Collections. It will inform you of all categories of land grants received by an individual and provide an abstract of the basic documents. When requesting this service, please indicate the name or names to be searched and, if known, the date of immigration to Texas.

## **Land History Search**

If you are conducting research on a particular parcel of land and wish to know about the original grantee, please indicate the name of the grantee and location of the land (county abstract number, if known). The research staff will send a list of documents on file for that location from which you may then order copies. Please note that the material contained in GLO files only relate to the *original* grant and will not contain records of subsequent subdivision.

## Services and Fees

- Genealogical research costs \$20.00 per name (effective March 30, 2011).
- Black and white photocopies are \$1.00 per page for legal and letter size and \$2.00 per page for ledger size. Color copies are \$2.00 per page for letter and legal size and \$3.00 per page for ledger size. Copies of patents are always in color and always certified. They require a standard fee of \$5.00.
- Current “working” copies of county maps are \$15.00. Color scanned copies of historic county maps are \$20.00 for all maps with at least one dimension 48 inches or smaller and \$40.00 for all maps with at least one dimension over 48 inches. The General Land Office has land grant boundary maps for every county in Texas. Many of the county maps made during the 19<sup>th</sup> century are available for reproduction. Some of these maps are very fragile or do not yet have digital images available and the Archives and Records Division reserves the right to decide which maps may be reproduced.
- Digital media: CD-\$11.00 per CD; or DVD-\$16.00 per DVD; or Digital Transfer Fee-\$16.00 per order - for transfer of large digital files over the Internet using a File Transfer Service (effective March 30, 2011).
- Research of the official records of the GLO requiring staff to perform extensive research: \$50.00 per hour, minimum one half hour, maximum four hours. (effective March 30, 2011)

## Other Sources of Information on Land Grants in Texas

Miller, Thomas L. *Bounty and Donation: Land Grants of Texas, 1835-1888*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1967.

Miller, Thomas L. *The Public Lands of Texas, 1519-1970*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1972.

Texas General Land Office. *Land: A History of the Texas General Land Office*. Austin: GLO, 1992.

or, visit the GLO web site at <http://www.glo.texas.gov>



**Texas General Land Office**  
• **George P. Bush, Commissioner** •  
1700 North Congress Avenue, Austin, Texas 78701  
Phone (512) 463-5277, 1-800-998-4GLO  
TDD (512) 463-5330